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Congress of Wonders

Celebrating “The Miracle of Birth” at Asilomar

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By Cassandra Brooks



Debra Pascali-Bonaro, the director of *Orgasmic Birth*, was in Asilomar last weekend for a screening of the film at a conference on “The Miracle of Birth - Uniting Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science.”

Hundreds of women from Monterey County and beyond came to Asilomar Conference Center for an international birth congress this past weekend (April 24-28). Amidst the soothing sounds of crashing waves, attendees sat in on talks and workshops with birth educators and experts from all over the world, including author Michel Odent, mothering expert/physician Sarah Buckley and *Orgasmic Birth* filmmaker Debra Pascali-Bonaro.

The conference on “The Miracle of Birth: Uniting Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science” was hosted by the Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health. Their hope was to offer birthing approaches and ideas that woman could bring to their local communities, including Monterey Bay.

Some of the local childbirth professionals and expecting moms who attended voiced their hope that Monterey would offer more diverse childbirth options. Currently, women have the choice to birth at home, or at CHOMP. Yet many women want a middle ground that places like birth centers provide, or a hospital that offers an array of birthing options.

Davene Wasser, a Pacific Grove soon-to-be mom, spent the weekend absorbing as much as possible before she embarks on her first birthing experience. She was enthused to have the meeting in her own backyard and reeled about being able to sit in a session with Michele Odent, who she referred to as a childbirth legend: “I am inspired there are so many ways to approach birthing.”

The congress also hosted a film screening of *Orgasmic Birth* as part of a workshop on Monday led by Pascali-Bonaro. A small crowd of attendees, including Wasser and hypnobirth instructor Danielle Rodhouse, came to Asilomar’s Merrill Hall to see the film.

In line with the philosophy of the weekend, Pascali-Bonaro says she made the film to show women that they have different birth options. “I really want to put it in women’s hands to make the choices of what they feel is safest for themselves and their babies,” she says. She hopes that women see that homebirth is an option, as well as birth centers. “But I also think we need to transform our hospital environment so that women can have really positive, pleasurable births,” she adds.

Many of the women who viewed the film at Asilomar were moved to tears by the powerful way birth was portrayed. Shannon Carnazzo, a registered nurse from Pacific Grove, did not attend the congress, but came to see the film.

4/30/2009

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“Seeing the film reaffirmed that my own births were pleasurable and beautiful,” she says. “I can’t wait to go home and tell my husband about it.”

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